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ABSTRACT

Any plan to institute student fees for California community colleges should address public concerns about budgetary matters, course repetitions, avocational courses, and courses that are not clearly lower division, while at the same time protecting districts from unanticipated enrollment losses and preserving the right of access to education by persons of modest means. One such approach to student fees would be to allow all matriculated students to take 70 units of community college education without fees, after which they would pay fees for all courses. Because students would be required to matriculate, this approach would improve student assessment, placement, and retention; provide for more efficient use of space; and promote a classroom atmosphere more conducive to learning. Additionally, matriculation would provide data for the study of reverse transfers, vocational retraining, avocational repeaters, and community college students in general. Although less direct revenue would accrue from this plan than from the imposition of fees for all students, hidden savings may result from: (1) a greater likelihood that students finish classes; (2) more care by students in selecting courses; and (3) greater student awareness of course requirements and earlier selection of goals. An appended paper answers questions concerning the proposed fee plan related to the need for a student fee policy, exceptions, matriculation, and the components of and rationale for the plan. (HB)

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THE CASE FOR A FEE POLICY THAT PROVIDES TWO YEARS OF FEE-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

VENTURA COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT
Alfred P. Fernandez, PH.D., Chancellor

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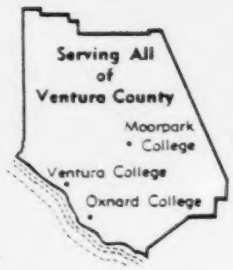

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Alfred P. Fernandez, Ph.D., Chancellor

THE CASE FOR A FEE POLICY THAT PROVIDES TWO YEARS OF FEE-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

A FEE POLICY FOR CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES SHOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH THE BASIC PHILOSOPHY PREVAILING IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES TODAY. SOME OF THE ACCEPTED CORNERSTONES OF THAT PHILOSOPHY INCLUDE:

1. RETAINING THE "OPEN DOOR" FOR ALL STUDENTS INCLUDING DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS.
2. PROVIDING A WIDE RANGE OF CREDIT PROGRAMS, INCLUDING TRANSFER EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, REMEDIAL EDUCATION AND CONTINUING EDUCATION.
3. SERVING AS A "SECOND-CHANCE" INSTITUTION FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN THE PAST.
4. PROTECTING THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES AS A UNIQUE AND ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE CALIFORNIA POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM.

I AGREE WITH THE BLOMERLY REPORT THAT A "SYSTEM OF STUDENT CHARGES SHOULD BE SENSITIVE TO THE VULNERABILITIES OF DISTRICTS AND THEIR STUDENTS. IF CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE TO BECOME MORE DEPENDENT ON STUDENT CHARGES AS A SOURCE OF FUNDING,

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS BE IMPLEMENTED SO AS TO PROTECT LOCAL DISTRICTS FROM THE FINANCIAL SHOCK OF UNANTICIPATED ENROLLMENT LOSSES, TO PRESERVE THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION BY PERSONS OF MODEST MEANS."

IT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED THAT THE TREND TOWARDS FEES, ALTHOUGH IT HAS BECOME ACUTE DUE TO BUDGETARY PROBLEMS, ALSO RELATES TO OTHER PERCEIVED CONCERNS OF THE LEGISLATURE AND GENERAL PUBLIC. CONCERN HAS BEEN EXPRESSED ABOUT COURSE REPETITIONS, AVOCATIONAL COURSES, GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS, AND THE OFFERING OF COURSES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES THAT ARE NOT CLEARLY LOWER DIVISION. THE BEST FEE PLAN WOULD BE ONE THAT WOULD CLEARLY ADDRESS THESE CONCERNS WITHOUT LIMITING ACCESS. I BELIEVE WE CAN SUGGEST SUCH A PLAN.

OUR PLAN IS AS FOLLOWS:

1. ALL STUDENTS WOULD BE ENTITLED TO 70 FEE-FREE UNITS. STUDENTS HAVING COMPLETED OR ATTEMPTED 70 UNITS AT ANY ACCREDITED INSTITUTION WOULD BE REQUIRED TO PAY FEES FOR ALL COURSES. STUDENTS WOULD BE REQUIRED TO MATRICULATE IN ORDER TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR FEE-FREE UNITS. THE 70 FEE-FREE CREDIT UNITS WOULD BE DETERMINED BY REVIEW OF THE ATTEMPTED UNITS REPORTED ON A STUDENT TRANSCRIPT. UNITS ATTEMPTED WITH A LETTER GRADE OF "W" WOULD COUNT TOWARD THE 70 UNITS. COURSES DROPPED PRIOR TO RECEIVING A "W" GRADE WOULD NOT COUNT TOWARD THE 70 FEE-FREE UNITS. <u>STUDENTS WOULD BE CHARGED FEES UNDER THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS</u>:

A. STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMPLETED AND/OR ATTEMPTED 70 UNITS.

B. NON-MATRICULATION. STUDENTS WHO CHOOSE NOT TO MATRICULATE.

C. STUDENTS WHO REPEAT A COURSE WHEN CREDIT HAS ALREADY BEEN EARNED FOR SAME. COURSES THAT ALLOW FOR CREDIT REPETITION WOULD BE EXCEPTED. HOWEVER, THE REPEATED COURSE WOULD COUNT TOWARD THE 70 UNITS.

D. STUDENTS WHO OPT TO AUDIT A COURSE.

THE OBVIOUS ADVANTAGE OF THIS PLAN IS THAT IT DOES RETAIN THE OPEN DOOR FOR THE YOUNGER INEXPERIENCED STUDENTS AND GIVES THEM A CHANCE TO GET STARTED IN COLLEGE AND LEARN THE VALUE OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION. HOWEVER, THERE ARE INDIRECT SAVINGS AND BENEFITS IN THE PLAN. IT MAY BE ARGUED THAT MATRICULATION WILL BE COSTLY AND DIFFICULT TO ADMINISTER, AND THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT IT WILL REQUIRE EXTRA LABOR AND ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL. NOTWITHSTANDING, THERE ARE EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS IN MATRICULATION WHICH SHOULD NOT BE OVERLOOKED. SINCE MATRICULATION REQUIRES HAVING TRANSCRIPTS ON FILE, STUDENTS WOULD RECEIVE MORE INFORMED ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT AND OTHER SERVICES FROM COUNSELORS AND OTHER STAFF.

1. IMPROVED STUDENT ASSESSMENT, A GOAL OF MANY DISTRICTS, WOULD TAKE PLACE.
2. BETTER PLACEMENT OF STUDENTS WOULD RESULT.
3. BETTER PLACEMENT WOULD RESULT IN IMPROVED RETENTION.
4. BETTER PLACEMENT WOULD RESULT IN MORE EFFICIENT USE OF AVAILABLE SEATS.
5. BETTER PLACEMENT WOULD RESULT IN A CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE MORE CONDUCIVE TO LEARNING.

MOREOVER, MATRICULATION WOULD PROVIDE DATA FOR THE STUDY OF SUCH AREAS AS:

1. REVERSE TRANSFERS
2. VOCATIONAL RETRAINING
3. IDENTIFICATION OF AVOCATIONAL REPEATERS
4. STUDENT BODY PROFILE

OBVIOUSLY, FOR ANY GIVEN FEE RATE, THIS PROPOSAL WOULD PROVIDE LESS DIRECT REVENUE THAN A PLAN THAT REQUIRES EVERYONE TO PAY. HOWEVER, THERE ARE HIDDEN SAVINGS WHICH MAY COMPENSATE FOR THIS FACT:

1. AS A RESULT OF HAVING A LIMITED NUMBER OF FEE-FREE UNITS, STUDENTS WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO FINISH CLASSES, THUS INCREASING OVERALL EFFICIENCY.
2. STUDENTS WILL BE MORE SELECTIVE AND AVOID COURSES NOT CONSISTENT WITH THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS.
3. STUDENTS WILL SELECT THEIR GOALS EARLIER AND BECOME MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT REQUIREMENTS. THIS COULD RESULT IN A SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTION IN THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CREDITS TAKEN BY STUDENTS PRIOR TO COMPLETING A DEGREE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, AN ALL PAY FEE PLAN COULD INITIALLY BENEFIT STATE FINANCES TO A GREATER DEGREE, BUT AT WHAT COST? QUITE POSSIBLY DECREASED STATE SUPPORT WOULD BE REQUIRED IF STUDENTS, BY CHOICE, OR INABILITY TO PAY, DID NOT TAKE COURSES. THE STATE WOULD SAVE ITS SHARE OF THE COST ON ADA (ABOUT 80%) WHEN COURSES WERE NOT TAKEN. HOWEVER, A SAVING FROM REDUCED ENROLLMENT

REPRESENTS A NEGATIVE APPROACH TO OUR CURRENT ECONOMIC DIFFICULTY. THE FEE-FREE PLAN ADVOCATED HERE COULD BE MORE EFFECTIVE COMPARED TO AN ALL PAY FEE PLAN THAT REDUCES ENROLLMENT. PRESERVING ACCESS, IN MY OPINION, IS THE MOST IMPORTANT DIMENSION TO ANY PLAN TO BE CONSIDERED.

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INFORMATION ON THE PROPOSED FEE POLICY THAT PROVIDES TWO YEARS OF FEE--FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

Consideration is being given by the Board of Governors to developing a contingency student fee policy for the California Community Colleges. Attached is our proposal for a fee policy that provides two years of fee-free community college education. In order for better understanding of our proposal, crucial questions that have been asked with the responding answers are provided in this paper:

Q.1. Why is it necessary to develop a student fee policy?

A.1. A contingency plan for imposing a state-wide student charge policy for community colleges was recommended by the State Postsecondary Education Commission in response to Assembly Resolution 81, and was endorsed by key legislators. The contingency plan is to be developed by the Board of Governors for implementation if it becomes necessary for fiscal year 1983-84.

Q.2. Why is this the best plan for a student fee policy?

A.2. The California Community Colleges have operated on these philosophical cornerstones for years; (1) there should be an open door for all students, including disadvantaged students, (2) there should be a wide range of credit instructional programs, (3) there

should be a "second chance" for those students who have not been successful in the past, and (4) the community colleges should be a unique and essential component of three segments of California higher education. This plan of the first 70 units being free will help maintain these cornerstones, e.g., according to the state Chancellor's Office study on the impact of alternate fee proposals, it will result in the smallest loss of income and smallest loss of students of other proposals for student charges. It follows the general recommendations of the state-wide Academic Senate and certainly is consistent with the basic policies of the California Community Colleges today. Above all, it preserves the right of access to education by persons of modest means.

Q.3. Why are 70 fee--free units used in this proposal?

A.3. Seventy units is proposed because it provides for most students to complete an associate degree and can include units for remediation or the extra units required frequently for vocational education degrees. There was also a basic belief that 70 units would satisfy the lower division requirements for transfer to upper division work at the college or university.

Q.4. Will there be exceptions made under this proposal?

A.4. Most likely not. Extra units for remediation and vocational education are to some degree included in the first 70 free units. In the case of senior citizens who have over 70 units, they will not be accommodated by the proposal. For those seniors that are economically

disadvantaged there might be some financial aid assistance.

Q.5. How will students who failed to report units earned at colleges and universities previously attended be handled?

A.4. First, the great majority of all students are honest and will not fail to report units from other colleges or universities. However, in cases where they do not, many of them will be detected when their high school transcripts are reviewed, since they will show transcripts being sent to other colleges. Probably the same mechanism used for determining units for certificates and degrees by other higher education institutions will be applied to solving this potential problem.

Q.6. What does matriculation mean and will it slow down the student registration process?

A.6. Matriculation in this process means that students would be registered when they had submitted appropriate transcripts and had received academic advisement and other services from counselors and other staff. Currently, many students do meet these conditions of matriculation, and it does not impact the student registration process. The advantage of the student meeting the matriculation requirement will be an improvement in their assessment, placement in courses, and in achieving their educational goals. Concurrently, it should improve retention, increase more efficient use of available classroom seats and result in more committed students in the classroom.

Q.7. What are the most essential components of this proposal?

A.7. The key component is that all students are entitled to 70 free-fee units. In effect, the state of California would be saying to community college students, we will give you the opportunity to earn a certificate and associate degree before you have to pay for your college education. However, once the student has used up her or his 70 units of free college education, s/he would then start to pay a fee. This should meet the current intentions of the legislature and the assembly concurrent resolution.

Q.8. Why is this plan superior to others which would be simpler and less costly to administer?

This proposal is superior because it provides for a continuation of the basic philosophical cornerstone of the California Community Colleges. In the long term, it reduces the loss of income to the colleges and the loss of opportunities for the new student, and particularly the disadvantaged student. It is superior because it provides the most benefits for the students and colleges if we must have student charges in 1983-84.

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